

Testimony Re: Bill 6998 An Act Concerning the Conveyance of Certain Parcels of State Lands Sections 3 & 8

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Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to register my very strong opposition to the proposed conservation land transfers in Sections 3 and 8 of Bill 6998.

Section 3 transfers 4+ very valuable acres of Silver Sands State Park to the town of Milford for zero dollars for the purpose of establishing a town parking lot for the exclusive use of its residents. When Silver Sands State Park finishes its multi-million upgrades and State Park entrance fees are instituted, the new "town parking lot," that has been carved from Silver Sands acreage over the strong objections of DEEP, will afford only the citizens of Milford free entrance to the expensively upgraded state park. Citizens of the State's other 168 towns and cities, however, will be required to pay their fair share to state coffers.

Should Section 3 not be removed from the bill, and its particulars are widely publicized, I can't imagine that the general public will not be as outraged as the many environmental advocates who have submitted testimony about this "sweetheart" arrangement. Sadly, more than a few might be inspired to pressure their legislators to initiate the same types of sordid little deals to seize coveted state park and forest lands for the sole benefit of their districts. It will be open season on our publically held conservation properties unless this committee and the entire legislature begin to summarily reject these kinds of self-serving destructive proposals.

Helping to fuel advocate anger, is our painful awareness of how many times "land grabs" of precious conservation properties have been quietly inserted into past Land Conveyance Bills and succeeded. One would think that a proposal to take acreage from a beautiful shoreline park for zero dollars for a town parking lot would be so brazen as to be laughable. However, just two years ago, the wealthy town of Madison orchestrated a transfer of 8 acres of Hammonasset Beach State Park for parking space in its new local park. Madison paid nothing for the land; the transfer proposal was slipped into the Conveyance Bill in the last hours of session; no opportunity was ever afforded for public hearing or debate. "Business as usual" was the public's response when they learned of the "done deal" they had had no power to stop or change because information about it had been purposefully withheld.

Any prospective transfer which is retained in the Land Conveyance Bill until the end of session or which is inserted in its last moments will be affirmed. Legislators have

not shown themselves willing to vote down the entire Land Conveyance Bill even if they know the bill contains some pretty awful propositions. Therefore, if Section 3 and the equally egregious Section 8 that conveys 100 acres of the Centennial Watershed Forest to the town of Fairfield for \$0 are not swiftly removed from the Land Conveyance Bill, the chance these transfers will be ultimately ratified is near 100%.

The misuse of the Conveyance Bill to forcibly or surreptitiously transfer valued state conservation land betrays citizens' trust and neutralizes so many good people's best intentions and selfless preservation efforts. This practice simply must cease. We ask this committee to have the courage and wisdom to support reform. Please make this process totally transparent in future and always to the benefit of all citizens.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Grant, Friends of CT State Parks Board of Directors
Past President 2007-2014